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Effects Of The Covid-19 Pandemic On The Private Security Sector

Tansel İŞKOL ^{1*}, Prof. Dr. Nuh Zafer CANTÜRK ², Alparslan OKÇU ³, Hande Ece İŞKOL ALEMDAR ⁴, İrem CANTÜRK ⁵, Ahmet Yasin ALEMDAR ⁶

¹VIP Security Services LLC, Founder and Director, Kocaeli, 41190, Türkiye

tanseliskol@gmail.com

²Rectorate of Kocaeli University, Rector, Kocaeli, 41380, Türkiye

canturkz@kocaeli.edu.tr

³Kocaeli University Registrar's Office, Head of Registrar's Office, Kocaeli, 41380, Türkiye

okcualparslan@hotmail.com

⁴VIP Security Services LLC, Interpreter, Kocaeli, 41190, Türkiye

handeiskol@gmail.com

⁵Department of Industrial Engineering, Faculty of Engineering, Sabancı University, Istanbul, 34956, Türkiye

iremcanturk99@gmail.com

⁶VIP Security Services LLC, Translator, Kocaeli, 41190, Türkiye

ahmetyalemdar@gmail.com

Abstract

The COVID-19 epidemic has been a devastating pandemic that has affected not only the healthcare sector but also all sectors including education, transport, tourism and business. Its effects persist throughout the normalization process. Private security forces are among the industries hit hardest by the pandemic. Both in Turkey and around the world, private security officers have played important roles in ensuring the safety of the public throughout the process. In this study, a survey was developed to measure the qualifications of private security officers working in companies that are active in various sectors in Turkey. The survey also questioned their views on their profession by highlighting the difficulties they had experienced during the pandemic. The results indicated that the public and the authorities should be informed regarding the important role of the private security forces and that the sector is crucial for the functioning of the social order. In fact, the survival of the private security sector without losing its primary purpose and suffering severe economic setbacks is extremely crucial for the welfare and peace of a society.

Keywords: COVID-19, Private Security Sector, Private Security Officers.

* Corresponding author: Tansel İŞKOLİ

² <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0042-9742>

1.Introduction

Coronavirus is a type of virus that first appeared in Wuhan, China in December 2019 and is defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as SARS-CoV2 (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome - Coronavirus-2)[1]. WHO declared COVID-19, used to describe the disease caused by the virus, a global health emergency on January 30, 2020 [2]. On March 11, 2020, the disease was a global epidemic (pandemic) and spread rapidly across the world [3]. In the early days of the pandemic, due to the lack of a suitable vaccine, many governments imposed curfews or lockdowns in order to curb the spread of the virus. In this framework, many countries adopted severe health policies and put their sources into solving the global health emergency. There have been various vaccines developed to combat the SARS-CoV2 virus, one of which was named CoronaVac. Although the vaccine produced a high level of anti-S1 response, the decrease in Anti-S1 antibody levels in vaccinated individuals was considered as a negative aspect [4]. Therefore, other available vaccines have been in higher demand globally. Currently there are eight vaccines in use throughout the world, all of which require two doses. A few of the most preferred shots are acknowledged to be Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, and Johnson & Johnson's Janssen.

Same as all other crises, the epidemic crisis has greatly increased the need for security. Along with healthcare workers, private security officers have been one of the labor groups which experienced the hardest hit by the pandemic[5]. Private security services, maintain law and order in social life and enable people to live fearlessly and safely. They play a complementary role in public security in societies. During the pandemic, private security officers, active both in Turkey and worldwide, have taken on important tasks such as protecting vacant offices, supporting access control in hospitals and nursing homes, managing the flow of visitors and implementing security measures in shops, transporting cash and valuables of all kinds, and securing the supply chain and critical infrastructure[6]. Private security forces are among the most important elements after healthcare workers for the efforts in combating the COVID-19. While millions of people have been confined to their homes and even avoided contact with their family members due to the COVID-19 pandemic, more than 320,000 private security guards worked with great dedication in over 90,000 locations across Turkey and still continue to function. With their services in hospitals, family care centers, testing centers and immunization areas, they have played crucial roles in addressing this public health crisis. When the UK Office for National Statistics (ONS) analyzed the mortality rates of different occupational groups in June 2020 [7], it was found that the mortality rate was 39.7 per 100,000 males, which is the highest annual male mortality rate due to Covid-19 [8]. Of these, security guards have been identified as the occupational group with the highest mortality rate[9].

The importance of this professional group has been made clear by the effects of the pandemic. In this new, inconsistent reality, private security services have supported the efforts of frontline workers and proved to be a crucial element for the functioning of the economy, not only during quarantine but also during regular times.

Private security services have always been needed to ensure security in various fields. However, due to aforementioned restrictions to fight the COVID-19 pandemic in Turkey and worldwide, sectors such as transportation, tourism and recreational activities were severely affected by the pandemic and the economic crises caused by the pandemic[10]. Since the beginning of the pandemic, industries such as airlines, tourism agencies, schools, concerts events and sports organizations have been at a complete dormancy[11]. This has caused severe damage to security companies and their staff whose entire income depends on these events. The vast majority of businesses were closed and staff had to relocate to other areas that required security. The total lockdown practice applied across Turkey as a pandemic measure has also negatively impacted the transportation and lives of private security personnel, and disruptions to local public transport and catering services have been addressed by staff or the security companies. This situation led to a direct increase in costs in the sector [12]. Many private security companies are expected to struggle to retain much needed workers if the economic crisis continues.

When the strictest containment measures were lifted in early summer of 2020, a new demand emerged for the private security sector, as it plays a crucial role in helping businesses reopen. Since the start of the lockdowns, the private security sector has seen an increasing need for protection and security in supermarkets, hospitals and nursing homes. More and more customers have ordered cameras or access control kiosks. With the start of the summer season and the gradual lifting of the measures within the EU, there has been an increasing demand for security personnel in the areas of security and tourism.

The aim of this study is to examine how and in which aspects the private security sector has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, which in many ways had a negative impact on the whole world. For this purpose, the qualification of private security officers working in companies in different fields in Turkey and their perspectives on the profession and the difficulties encountered during the pandemic process were analyzed using a survey method.

2.Methods

Here, an attempt was made to determine the viewpoints of the workers who provide security services at different fields around Turkey regarding their profession. A survey was used to highlight the problems that they have experience during the COVID-19 period. The survey was conducted with 350 people in seven different sectors from Istanbul, Ankara and Kocaeli. 50 people from each region were selected. The sectors and regions sampled are as follows: Health Sector, Kocaeli University Hospital; Factory, Istanbul, Ankara, Kocaeli; security of sports facilities, Istanbul, Ankara, Kocaeli; Port Security, Kocaeli; event security, Istanbul; security in shopping malls Istanbul; Site security, Istanbul, Ankara, Kocaeli.

The qualifications of the personnel, their perspectives on the profession and their evaluations in the COVID-19 process were carried out under three subheadings.

3. Results

The distribution of survey volunteers by gender is presented in Table 1. A very high percentage of male officers work at health services, buildings, event organizations, malls, ports and factories. On the other hand, there are no female employees working in ports and factories. Considering the age distribution of the volunteers, the age group of 35 to 50 year olds represents the highest working age group. In most of these sectors, this age group accounts for more than half of all employees. For instance, 60% of security guards working in ports and factories were in the 35-50 years old age group. While there were no security guards over the age of 50 in the health care, sport and shopping center sectors, evidence suggested that they were employed in small numbers in other sectors. The distribution of the volunteers participating in the survey by marital status was also examined; It is noteworthy that a significant part of the staff was married. Most workers in the factory and healthcare sector, especially in the port security sector were married. Among the single people, security guards in sports rank first, while the security guards in shopping malls were second in rank.

Table 1: Socio-demographic Information Questions

VARIABLES		Health		Sport		Port		Factory		Site		Activity		Mall	
Gender	Male	46	92%	27	54%	50	100%	50	100%	44	88%	46	92%	46	92%
	Woman	4	8%	23	46%	-	-	-	-	6	12%	4	8%	4	8%
	Total	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%
Age	18-25 age	2	4%	17	34%	4	8%	4	8%	6	12%	6	12%	2	4%
	26-35 age	17	34%	16	32%	14	28%	9	18%	21	42%	12	24%	19	38%
	36-50 age	31	62%	17	34%	30	60%	30	60%	21	42%	26	52%	29	58%
	51 and above	-	-	-	-	2	4%	7	14%	2	4%	6	12%	-	-
	Total	50	%100	50	%100	50	%100	50	%100	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%
Marital status	Married	31	%62	28	%56	34	%68	31	%62	31	62%	26	52%	30	60%
	Single	19	%38	22	%44	16	%32	19	%38	19	38%	24	48%	20	40%
	Total	50	%100	50	%100	50	%100	50	%100	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%
Educational status	Primary education	-	-	2	%4	8	%16	9	%18	11	22%	8	16%	-	-
	High school	30	60%	33	66%	34	68%	27	54%	31	62%	34	68%	42	84%
	College	12	24%	4	8%	2	4%	5	10%	4	8%	-	-	-	-
	University	8	16%	11	22%	6	12%	9	18%	6	12%	8	16%	8	16%
	Total	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%
Tenure time	0-1	2	4%	15	30%	6	12%	9	18%	11	22%	8	16%	-	-
	2-3	5	10%	4	8%	6	12%	4	8%	11	22%	8	16%	6	12%
	4-5	3	6%	13	26%	4	8%	8	16%	6	12%	4	8%	6	12%
	6-10	16	32%	10	20%	16	32%	16	32%	12	24%	10	20%	20	40%
	11 and above	24	48%	8	16%	18	36%	13	26%	10	20%	20	40%	18	36%
	Total	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%
	Monthly income	Min. Wa.	-	-	33	66%	26	52%	19	38%	30	60%	20	40%	-
3-4000	4	8%	9	18%	18	32%	19	38%	16	32%	14	28%	40	80%	
4-5000	45	90%	8	16%	6	12%	12	24%	4	%8	14	28%	10	20%	
5-6000	1	2%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	4%	-	-	
6000 and above	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Total	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	
Reason for Entering the	My dream job	4	8%	17	34%	-	-	2	4%	18	36%	8	16%	22	44%
	No other job	34	68%	23	46%	23	46%	20	20%	11	22%	24	48%	16	32%

VARIABLES		Health		Sport		Port		Factory		Site		Activity		Mall	
Industry	Other	12	24%	10	20%	27	54%	28	56%	21	42%	18	36%	12	24%
	Total	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%
Work satisfaction	Yes	18	36%	44	88%	18	36%	32	64%	40	80%	32	64%	50	100%
	No	13	26%	-	-	18	36%	7	14%	2	4%	16	32%	-	-
	I'm undecided	14	28%	6	12%	14	28%	11	22%	8	16%	2	4%	-	-
	Total	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%
Income assessment	Yes	3	6%	15	30%	-	-	5	10%	10	20%	22	44%	2	4%
	No	47	94%	35	70%	50	100%	45	90%	40	80%	28	56%	48	96%
	Total	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%
People's view of the profession	Doesn't take it seriously	26	52%	14	28%	20	40%	12	24%	20	40%	28	56%	50	100%
	If he to	18	36%	34	68%	28	56%	35	70%	26	52%	20	40%	-	-
	Up to general law enforcement	2	4%	2	4%	-	-	1	2%	4	8%	-	-	-	-
	Other	4	8%	-	-	2	4%	2	4%	-	-	2	4%	-	-
	Total	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%
Professional expectation	Timely payment of the fee	9	18%	16	32%	16	32%	8	16%	9	18%	10	20%	25	50%
	Fulfilling the task smoothly	12	24%	8	16%	30	60%	13	26%	19	38%	12	24%	3	6%
	No more value	26	52%	26	52%	4	8%	27	54%	17	34%	25	50%	19	38%
	Other	1	2%	-	-	-	-	2	4%	5	10%	3	6%	3	6%
	Total	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%

When the distribution of volunteers taking part in the survey was examined by their education level; most security guards graduated from high school and equivalency. The number of graduates from high schools and universities was significantly higher than that of primary school graduates. Employees with a high school diploma or equivalency rank first in the mall sector, while the social activity sector ranks second. Primary school graduates were mainly active in building security, while university graduates were mainly active in the sports sector. The distribution of the volunteers taking part in the survey was analyzed according to the length of service they spend in the job. The majority of the security personnel consisted of people who have been employed for 5-10 years or more. Almost half of the security guards working in the healthcare sector have a tenure of more than 10 years. In the mall security area, 40% of staff served 5-10 years or more; It turns out that 36% of the security personnel have been working for more than 10 years. On the other hand, the number of security personnel with 0-1 year experience was not found to be serving at the shopping centers while only 4% served in the healthcare sector. The results of the survey demonstrated that the average monthly distribution wage was around 3,000-5,000 TL per month during the pandemic. Accordingly, there was no staff receiving wages exceeding 6,000 TL. Most wages were in the range of 3-4,000 TL. While there was no minimum wage for workers in the healthcare and shopping mall sector, it ranged around 5,000-6,000 TL. It can be seen that the number of security guards who receive a wage in this area was only 3 people in total. When the distribution of volunteers participating in the survey was examined for the reasons for entering the sector; the main reason was determined to be the lack of other jobs. Only the employees working in the shopping centers, off-road and sports areas reported their job as their dream jobs. On the other hand, the number of people who work in the healthcare and factory sectors and presented their job as their dream job was quite a few.

The distribution of the volunteers taking part in the survey was examined for their job satisfaction. Majority of the employees were satisfied with the provision of services in this field. The satisfaction was 100% in the mall security sector and 88% in the sports security sector. However, the positive satisfaction in port and healthcare sectors was lower.

Looking at the distribution of the volunteers taking part in the survey with regard to salary satisfaction, most private security guards found their wages unsatisfactory. The salaries ranged from 3,000 to 5,000 TL and were not considered enough to cover the living expenses. Of those who did not find their wages satisfactory, 96% worked in the healthcare and factory areas. The security workers in ports and shopping centers who were not happy with their salaries were around 90%.

When the opinion of citizens were evaluated regarding private security forces their choice was “not taking them seriously”. The responses to the question clearly give the impression, at 100%, that private security forces, particularly in the shopping malls, were not taken seriously in the eyes of the public. In the area of activity and healthcare, the negative impression was over 50%. Adding to these figures the answers to the question “if he has to” shows that a very high percentage of citizens did not take the work of private security forces seriously or did take it seriously only when it was necessary.

When the expectations were asked to the participants of the survey, four options were presented to choose: (1) Timely payment of wages, (2) ability to perform tasks with ease, (3) higher added value and (4) other options. The results showed that private security officers placed more emphasis on two of the choices; (1) higher added value and (2) completing the task with ease. Especially, perceptions of higher added value appear to be dominated in four sectors, health, sport, factory and activity. When it comes to expecting fees to be paid on time, the shopping center industry comes first with 50% satisfaction. On the other hand, in the port sector, unlike other options, the option to get the job done is far more prominent than the higher added value.

To the volunteers who took the survey, the question of “have you, your close family members or your colleagues tested positive due COVID-19?” was asked. Most of them answered “yes” to this question. Private security guards at the mall answered “yes” to all of these questions. Healthcare workers were at 90% and port sector workers were at 80% level, followed by workers in shopping malls. The participants who replied negatively were from the sports sector, followed by the recreational activity sector.

This question regarding the most challenging aspects of the pandemic was asked to the private security forces and their concerns were mostly pointed to the future concerns, overwork, transportation, food shortage and an increased workload. Accordingly, it showed that concerns about the future have come to the fore in the private security sector, as in many other sectors, during the pandemic process.

Table 2. Questions About The Pandemic

VARIABLES		Health		Sport		Port		Factory		Site		Activity		Mall	
Pre-pandemic working status	Yes	48	96%	34	68%	46	92%	43	86%	42	84%	42	84%	50	100%
	No	2	4%	16	32%	4	8%	7	14%	8	16%	8	16%	-	-
	Total	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%
Thought of quitting	Yes	10	20%	6	12%	18	36%	2	4%	1	2%	22	44%	2	4%
	No	40	80%	44	88%	32	64%	48	96%	49	98%	28	56%	48	96%
	Total	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%
The state of being affected by the immediate environment	Yes	45	90%	27	54%	40	80%	39	78%	32	64%	28	56%	50	100%
	No	5	10%	23	46%	10	20%	11	22%	18	36%	22	44%	-	-
	Total	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%
Difficulties due to the pandemic	Future anxiety	9	18%	40	80%	24	48%	30	60%	32	64%	20	40%	34	68%
	Working hard	11	22%	2	4%	1	2%	2	4%	1	2%	6	12%	2	4%
	Disruptions in transportation and meals	2	4%	2	4%	11	22%	8	16%	9	18%	6	12%	10	20%
	Workload	22	44%	2	4%	12	24%	8	16%	1	2%	10	20%	2	4%
	Other	6	12%	4	8%	2	4%	2	4%	7	14%	8	16%	2	4%
	Total	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%
Increase in workload	Yes	45	90%	35	70%	32	64%	35	70%	24	48%	28	56%	47	94%
	No	5	10%	15	30%	18	36%	15	30%	26	52%	22	24%	3	6%
	Total	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%
Information about the pandemic	Yes	26	52%	40	80%	16	32%	33	66%	42	84%	32	64%	48	96%
	No	24	48%	10	20%	34	68%	17	34%	8	16%	18	36%	2	4%
	Total	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%

VARIABLES		Health		Sport		Port		Factory		Site		Activity		Mall	
Hygiene requirement	Yes	18	36%	25	50%	26	52%	12	24%	11	22%	18	36%	6	12%
	No	32	64%	25	50%	26	52%	12	24%	11	22%	18	36%	6	12%
	Total	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%
Security risk related to the pandemic in the working environment	Yes	31	62%	6	12%	18	36%	7	14%	7	14%	24	48%	-	-
	No	19	38%	44	88%	32	64%	43	86%	43	86%	26	52%	50	100%
	Total	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%
understanding the importance of the industry	Yes	11	22%	23	46%	14	28%	24	48%	22	44%	30	60%	6	12%
	No	18	36%	2	4%	4	8%	11	22%	7	14%	8	16%	15	30%
	Partially	21	42%	25	50%	32	64%	15	30%	21	42%	12	24%	29	58%
	Total	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%	50	100%

Table 2 showed that up to 80% of private security forces working in the sports sector were worried about their future. While the sports sector is followed by the shopping center sector with 68%, it showed that more than half of the housing development and factory sectors were also worried about the future. Responses to the question of whether the workload has increased during the pandemic process were evaluated; 94% of mall workers answered yes, followed by workers in the healthcare sector with 90%. The workload had increased by more than 50% in all areas except the site area.

When the answers given to the question of “During the pandemic, have you been sufficiently informed by your security company about the pandemic measures?” were evaluated; a significant part of the respondents answered “yes”. The highest rate of yes given to the question came from shopping mall workers with a ratio of 94%, followed by sports sector workers with 80%. These sectors were followed by the factory, healthcare, event, site and port sector workers. The port sector was the sector where the security forces were least informed with 68%.

When the answers given to the question of “Masks, gloves, disinfectants, etc. are required for personal hygiene and protection measures. Did you have any trouble accessing the equipment?” were evaluated; the hygiene requirements that private security officers followed during the pandemic process were not met to the expectations in all sectors except the port sector. While the rate was 88% in the shopping mall sector, it was 78% in the site security sector. Only two of the sectors (port and sports) met their hygiene requirement expectation with a rate of 50% or more as participants stated.

When the answers to the question of “Is there a security risk due to the pandemic in the facility where you are working?” were evaluated; 100% of shopping mall workers said "No" followed by all other sector workers with a 50% rate except for the healthcare sector workers.

When the question of “Has the pandemic helped society to better understand the importance of the work performed by the security and healthcare workers? were asked, the ones who answered this question as “very important” were around 20 to 50 percent, indicating that the importance of these sectors were not sufficiently appreciated.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

The whole world is going through a difficult time due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This epidemic disease caused by the virus has become a serious threat and fear factor for mankind[13]. In such situations, people are rightly concerned for their own safety and that of their families [14].

Security institutions play a key role and importance in reducing the negative costs of pandemics and devastating diseases. However, these institutions can only be successful if the security personnel are trustworthy, respected by all sections of the population, effectively respond to the diverse security needs of the entire population, and are universally accepted. In this whole process, the existence of accountability of security personnel to democratic control mechanisms is also an essential point.

When the gender distribution of the volunteers taking part in the survey is examined by their professional groups; the majority of workers in the port and factory were predominantly male due to the difficulty of the work area, which is why these areas were not favored by either the employer or the employee in favor of women.

If the age distribution of the volunteers taking part in the survey was examined according to their professional groups; security guards over the age of 50 were not preferred by the employers. However, the staff between the ages of 35-50 years were preferred mostly because they were considered to be more experienced.

When the educational status of the volunteers participating in the survey was examined according to their occupational groups; although the number of high school graduates was the highest in all sectors, the number of college and university graduates were gradually increasing. When the average monthly salary of volunteers participating in the survey was analyzed by occupation, salaries for security guards in the private sector have been found to be above the minimum wage, but not quite high enough. When examining the reasons why private security guards choose this profession, it was found that they prefer the profession mainly because they could not find another job. The answer to my dream job question given by the employees crowded upon the shopping center, off-road and sports areas. On the other hand, the number of people who claimed it was their dream job was quite low, especially in healthcare and factory sectors. This could indicate that private security guards make their assessments based on the difficulty and stress level of the environment in which they work. Considering that the health, port and factory sectors work under quite challenging conditions, one can only say that it is a natural consequence that the answers of the employees were this way.

The answer of “couldn't find another job” implies that private security employees were not satisfied with their jobs. When they were asked about the expectations of the place where the service was provided, four choices were offered: The choices were timely payment of wages, ability to perform tasks smoothly, higher added value and other options. The expectation of timely payment of wages and ability to perform tasks smoothly were highly selected choices although the preferences varied from sector to sector. The choice of higher added value was the preferred choice in four sectors, namely health, sport, factory and activity. When it comes to timely payment of wages, the shopping center

industry comes first with a 50% preference ratio. On the other hand, in the port sector, unlike other options, the option to get the job done is far more important than the others. In general, there were no major problems with the timely payment of wages, but there was an impression that their work was not valued as it should be.

The evaluation of job security was questioned by asking if security personnel were fired or suspended from the work during the pandemic process. Despite the pandemic, the staff continued to carry out their duties. However, the workload and anxiety about their future were increasing. Except ports, during informing about the risks of pandemic and the cautionary measures, it was observed that no significant safety risks were observed in the sampled area. There was a perception that society did not take into account the importance of personnel working for the security sector. Apparently, the importance of security guards was not sufficiently taken into account by the society even under difficult conditions.

If private security guards leave the industry due to the financial difficulties caused by the crisis, it will be quite challenging and almost impossible to respond to the demand for services in cases where new challenges to public health and safety may arise during the post-crisis period. Thus, the working conditions of private security guards should be reevaluated. In Turkey, legal regulations on private security need to be reevaluated and improved. In this context, the positioning of private security guards, reorganization of service areas and wage policy must be taken into account. Social awareness should be increased along with legal regulations and practices in order to raise the occupational perception of the employees above today's standards.

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